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Editorial

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Editorial

Jane Skalicky

Welcome to Volume 10 of the *Journal of Peer Learning*. The Journal has now published 75 articles, which have been downloaded more than 41, 000 times, and remains the premier journal internationally in the field of peer learning. This will be my last volume as Editor, and it has been an absolute pleasure to work with the Journal's Editorial Board, Associate Editors, and Copy Editor. We welcome the incoming Editor, Dr Bryce Bunting, to the role; Bryce has been an Associate Editor for several years and is very well placed to continue the oversight and management of the Journal internationally.

This issue includes six peer-reviewed articles from Australia, China, Japan and Nigeria. These six articles provide valuable insight into a diverse range of applications of peer learning in education from around the world and the ways in which peer learning can enhance both the student learning process and experience.

The first article, by Miao, Henderson, and Supple, explores ways in which pre-departure peer learning partnerships can support Chinese students' preparation for and transition to academic life in Australia. Chinese students in China were paired one-on-one with students in Australia for weekly online Skype sessions to discuss cultural issues and university-related topics. The authors used a mixed methods approach to examine the impact of these partnerships, incorporating thematic analysis of student Skype conversations, open-ended survey questions, and a quantitative questionnaire. The results of the study suggest that the online peer learning partnership was mutually beneficial to both groups of students: Chinese students gained valuable intercultural experiences and academic-related advice while the Australian-based students learned about the Chinese students' culture and educational system and strengthened awareness of their own cultural and learning contexts. The authors conclude that early (pre-departure) peer learning experiences can enhance the successful transition of international students moving to an Australian higher educational setting by increasing their knowledge of Australian culture, university life, and academic expectations; by motivating them to improve their language and communication skills; and by boosting their confidence to build new relationships and engage with their new educational environment.

The second article by Bissoonauth-Bedford and Stace examines a volunteer "language ambassadors" project at the University of Wollongong, Australia, in which university language students with experience in language learning supported high school students in their learning of foreign languages. The project sought to engage and motivate young students to learn languages through interactions with their university peers and to increase student enrolment in foreign languages by creating a bridge between secondary and tertiary education. The authors adopted a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews to examine the ways in

which the high school students and their university student peers perceived and evaluated the language ambassadors program. The results indicated that both groups viewed the experience positively, with the student ambassadors being perceived as the “expert other” who could provide extra and more individualised support that was tailored specifically to the high school students’ needs. The authors suggest that guidance by more advanced learners in the form of social interaction and personal reflection enhance the successful learning of foreign languages.

Minagawa’s article examines the benefits of a coursework task in a third-year Japanese linguistics course that embraced aspects of collaborative peer learning that are not usually practised in Japanese language learning. Students in the course were required to reflect on language use and on their own understanding of language. In the first phase, students analysed (video and transcript) the language use of one of the main characters in a TV drama. The second phase incorporated a peer learning task by requiring that students compare their own analysis with a student-peer’s analysis of the other main character of the TV drama who was of a different gender. This approach enabled students to discuss whether language use and variation differed across gender. The authors invited participants to comment on their perceptions of using a student-peer’s work to enable and enhance their own work so as to provide insight into how the students experienced the process of collaborative learning with peers. A thematic analysis of students’ comments suggested that students were able to incorporate their peers’ views effectively to develop their own comparison of language use across gender. The authors consider their results in relation to three specific benefits of collaborative peer learning: developing positive interdependence, a widening and reassessment of views, and learning to challenge established knowledge and authority.

Zamberlan and Wilson report an action research project involving the redesign, implementation, and evaluation of a peer tutor program embedded in a first-year Australian creative studio course. Of particular focus in the current article is an evaluation of the peer learning program on student learning and experience. The student peers were senior-year students whose role was to assist studio staff and work with first-year students during the semester in the development of design process skills and visual communication techniques. Focus groups were conducted with both the first-year students who enrolled in the course and the peer tutors to provide perspectives on the contribution of peer tutors and their impact on learning and the learning process. A thematic analysis of the focus group data was undertaken and involved an examination of the substantive content of discussion as well as the interaction between participants. The results suggest that peer tutors make a significant contribution to the development of a positive studio culture by enhancing a collaborative and creative community of practice and by increasing student learning of and engagement with creative processes. The authors discuss their results in relation to current theories about peer learning programs and the unique roles played by peer tutors in creative design and in other practice-based disciplines.

The article by Gambari and Yusuf reports a quantitative study of the relative effectiveness of computer-supported cooperative learning environments on the performance, attitudes, and retention of secondary school students

studying physics in Nigeria. Students were assigned to one of four computer-assisted physics learning groups with pre- and post-test measures on a physics achievement test and physics attitude scale collected. Three of the four groups engaged in different forms of cooperative learning settings where students worked together throughout the entire learning process (STAD, Jigsaw II) or in combination with individual instruction (TAI) to attain group goals. The fourth group of students undertook individualised computer instruction (ICI) throughout the entire learning period and did not engage in cooperative learning. The authors found that, although cooperative learning strategies did not improve student retention rates compared to individualised computer instruction, there were significant differences between groups in the performance and attitudes of students. All groups of students benefited from the educational physics program, with students who engaged in cooperative learning environments performing better and having more positive post-test attitudes towards physics than students who had only individual computer instruction. The authors conclude that exposing students to computer-supported cooperative learning environments is an effective way of overcoming poor performance in physics and in building positive attitudes towards the study of physics.

In the final article, AbdulRaheem, Yusuf, and Odutayo examine peer learning in students studying Economics in Nigeria as an alternative teaching and learning approach to the conventional teacher-led instructional approach. The study compared two classes from two different secondary schools with the same Economics curriculum and the moderating effect of gender on performance on an economics test (pre-post testing). Gender was of particular interest to these authors as there is a large gender-disparity in the academic performance of school students in Nigeria. One class received peer learning (experimental group) while the other class received conventional instruction and acted as a control group. Their results showed that students in the peer learning group performed overall better than students in the conventional learning group. Gender was found to have no effect on performance. The authors suggest that, in addition to having a positive effect on performance, peer learning transforms the learning space from a classroom where information is disseminated by one person (the teacher) to a place where students learn from multiple perspectives and each other.